

An Interview with Karl Pope



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Getting Involved in Theatre

I was going to say my involvement in theatre started in high school, but it may have gone back even further into elementary school. I had the same color hair then, a little bit more, and the teachers used to get me to play Santa Claus for the other kids; so I started off in that acting venue, I guess, clear back in elementary school.

As I moved into high school, I looked at actors as being people that were special. They were the movers and shakers on the high school campus. I was impressed with them, but knew I wasn't in their league. Finally, as a sophomore, I was playing football, and after practice one night a couple of the guys that were on the team wanted me to come try out for a play.

I said, "No, no."

They said, "Well, we're going to go do it, so you need to come too."

I said, "No, I don't think so."

They said, "Well, come watch."

So I did. While I was sitting there watching, somebody conned me into going up and reading, and it turned out it was a little scary. It was a play called *Divine Flora*, and it had a cowboy in it. As the tryouts were going along, I could tell that I had a good shot at being cast as one of the leads, and I didn't want that. Finally, another kid showed up who looked like a cowboy—walked like a cowboy, sounded like a cowboy—and he was cast. I got a minor role, and I guess that's when the bug bit. I started being in a series of plays after that, and did a number of plays in high school. I thought I wanted to be an actor at one time, either that or a high school teacher. One year, we had a high school teacher who showed us that instead of majoring in English and minoring in drama, or vice versa, he had majored in theatre and minored in art. I thought that was a good combination.

I acted in a Eugene O'Neill play, *Ile*, for a contest, and I came out to Brigham Young University and was offered a scholarship to both the University of Utah and BYU. Of course I couldn't take it as a junior, but they would hold it over. Finally, my senior year of high school, I played the role of Cai in a Chinese play called *Lute Song*. When I came out to BYU, Lael Woodbury was here directing *Lute Song*, and so I decided I'd like to try out for that. In fact, as I tried out, I told him that I had played Cai in high school, just a couple months before, so I still knew all the lines. He graciously thanked me and cast a graduate student in the role. He cast me in a minor part as a priest of Buddha, and that was my start at BYU.

Jumping back a little bit, while I was in high school I found out that my dad had done some work with theatre, not so much on the front of the stage, but behind the scenes—except he was in some operas. He was the high school electrician. One of the plays he worked on was directed by Stella Harris—that name may not ring a bell. She married a physician by the name of Lloyd Oaks, and they are the parents of Dallin Oaks and that family. So Stella Harris was directing a play called *Smilin' Through*. It's one of those tear jerkers where the lights are supposed to get dimmer and dimmer and dimmer towards the end of the play, so my dad devised some salt-water dimmers. He got some galvanized tubs, filled them with water, added the salt, put the electrodes in, and was able to get the lights to go dimmer and dimmer. He said that by the end of the play, though, the water was getting so hot it was boiling, and the lights were starting to bounce up and down in the process.

Because of him, in high school I also wanted to be on the stage crew, and did some lighting. I knew nothing about lighting, but that was okay, because the directors didn't know anything about lighting either. We had a stage that was in a building built in the early twenties, which may tell you how the lighting was. Basically, there were footlights that came up and a set of border lights and that was it. We had, I think, three or four circuits, so we had red lights and blue lights and white lights; we knew nothing about colors, but did what we could. Finally I decided that the lighting wasn't quite right, so I talked the director into letting me hang some battens out in front of the curtains. We put some clamp-on lights on a two-by-four up there, and got a little better lighting that way. That was my introduction into lighting.

As an actor, I thought I wanted to be an actor, and when I came out to BYU, I tried out for several plays and was successful. As a graduate student, I got in a play by Maxwell Anderson called *Elizabeth the Queen* and played opposite a professional actor that we brought in from Kalamazoo, Michigan. Up until that time, our plays had only run four nights: Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. That play was in the arena theatre, and ran for three weeks. At the end of that time, I decided I wasn't interested in being an actor. I'd had enough of acting just consuming my life. I wanted to do other things too, so I started looking at other avenues.

As a graduate student I needed some sort of a project, and I talked to Harold Hansen, who was my mentor, and he said, "Why don't you design a play for us?"

I thought about that and decided, *Yeah, that makes sense*. I was majoring in speech and drama, and my minor had been art, so I could put those two together, and that seemed good. I and another colleague of mine were going to design one of two plays available that Hansen was directing; one was *Carousel*, the other one was *Othello*. We flipped a coin, I think, and the other student got *Othello*, and I got *Carousel*. That was good, and that was my first design.

College Hall Theatre

That was all happening pre-HFAC. Up until 1951, the only theatre on the BYU campus was the one on what we'd refer to as the Lower Campus, which is where the Provo City Library is now. There was a complex on that block of four buildings, and that's where the old Brigham Young Academy was. That's where it started, before the first building—the Maeser Building—was built up here on what was referred to as Temple Hill. That was essentially the campus down there.

In a building that was on the southeast corner, there was a small theatre up on the top floor. That was the College Building, and up there was a theatre called College Hall. That was a facility where classes could be taught, where assemblies could be held—anything that needed space for a large number of people. The stage would have been about three feet off from the floor, probably about thirty or thirty-five feet wide, and there was hardly any wing space—no back stage space and no fly space. It was your typical LDS cultural hall stage.

As for dimmers, at the back of the auditorium there were holes where projectors could push through to put a movie down on the screen. Up above, there were handles you could pull down to run rheostat dimmers to change the intensity on the lights. Right in the middle of the ceiling there was a box that could be lowered on a wench, and somebody could go up in the attic, come down to sit in there, and man a follow-spot from that position. There could be some light mounted in there, but most of the lights were like my high school stage: upstage of the curtain. I don't remember that the stage had any footlights on it; there could have been some portable lights put on, but most of the lighting was done from two overhead borders. I also don't recall that there were any sidelights, although stands could have been put there too; I don't think we had enough circuits for that anyway. It was an interesting set-up, but again, it was built before the turn of the century, so it was pretty good for the times.

The Joseph Smith Memorial Building

In about 1950, Ernest L. Wilkinson became President of Brigham Young University. He was interested in doing all kinds of construction, developing the university, expanding the university. He was also interested in getting more PhDs on campus. So for the drama department—or speech department or speech and theatre department, it's had many names over the years—he decided that he would go up to Utah State University, which was Utah State Agricultural College at that point. He went up there and tapped Harold I. Hansen to come down and become the new chairman. A man by the name of T. Earl Pardoe had been the chairman here for a number of years and did not hold a PhD, and Doctor Wilkinson wanted someone with that degree, and with the credentials that Doctor Hansen had, to lead the department. So he got him, or asked him to come.

Doctor Hansen said that he wasn't interested in directing plays on that little stage down on Lower Campus. By that time, a number of buildings had been built up on Temple Hill, and so we

talked about the Upper Campus and the Lower Campus, and Doctor Hansen didn't want to be down on Lower Campus.

Doctor Wilkinson said, "Well, what, then?"

Brother Hansen replied, "Well, I would like to direct the plays in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building." That was kind of a new idea.

President Wilkinson said, "Well, we already have a theatre that's on the books. That's supposed to be the next building to be built, and it will be built over there"—over where the current law building is.

Brother Hansen said, "No, I want something *now*. It may be awhile before that building is built." And of course, that building, a theatre building, was never built. The HFAC was built some years later.

This presented a bit of a problem, because there would have to be some alterations made to the Joseph Smith Auditorium. They went to the Board of Trustees, and Brother Hansen presented his ideas.

One member of the board said, "Oh, no, that won't work. We cannot do theatre in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. That is the building where the College of Religion is housed, and we should only have sacred things done there."

Up to that point, we would have some assemblies maybe where the student body would come, we would have concerts, choral numbers and so forth, but it was all in keeping with that sacred edifice.

Brother Hansen's comment to them—which has been my mantra, I guess—is "If a play can't be done in a Joseph Smith Building, it shouldn't be done."

I guess that was a talking point. If it can't be done in one of our chapels, on one of the stages in one of our chapels, it shouldn't be done. That was the direction the faculty went for years and years at BYU.

The Joseph Smith Memorial Building was about sixty feet wide. On the east end, there was a large stage that would have been at least four, maybe four and a half, feet high, and there was a motorized curtain that could be opened to expose the whole stage. But that meant that there was no wing space at all, so that adjustment had to be made. At the back, there was no depth—no depth as far as theatre was concerned—because a large grillwork covered the pipes for the pipe organ. That was historic; a lot of those pipes had come out of the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City when that organ was renovated from time to time. So very special pipes were back there behind the grillwork. Then down on the right side of the auditorium, or down off of stage left, there was a huge organ console, which was in the way. There was no fly space over the top of the stage.

So it was like College Hall, except on a larger scale. Not only that, it had apparently been designed so theatre could not be done there. The floor was about twelve inches lower than a lip that came around the front of the stage, so Doctor Hansen wanted the floor raised to that level so it would be flat; otherwise, it'd cut off the actors about at the knee when you looked up at that angle. So the stage floor was raised.

Then there was no lighting—of course there were fluorescent lights over head so the singers or the musicians could read their music—but no theatre lighting. That was remedied by cutting some holes in the ceiling out over the auditorium and dropping electrical battens down through those holes. When they were not in use, they got ahold of them with ropes and pulled them back up where they needed to be. While they were down, after they tied the ropes on, they would mount all of the spot lights, ellipsoidal spotlights, on the battens, and then pull them up to trim. So we had front lighting, and it was mostly done then with front lighting on the stage.

There was no light booth, but there was a sound booth up on the second floor. This auditorium cut up through two floors of the Joseph Smith Building, so it was very high. Up on the second floor, you could get into the sound booth, and it had a sliding glass window that could be opened. That was where the sound equipment was for recording any of the musical presentations down on the stage; or if a speaker came and spoke to the students, they could record him.

By the way, when I talk about the student body, it was a little bit smaller than now. When I entered BYU as a freshman in 1955, the student body numbered 8,000, four thousand of whom were freshman.

So that was what the building looked like when I came. After the floor was done, the lights were put in. Then some Ariel Davis autotransformer dimmers were put up in the sound booth, and that's where the lights were run from. We had what was called a *trim* that had two 6K Ariel Davis slide dimmers, and a triplet that had three 6K's. Then we had another 6,000-watt dimmer, each with 1,000-watt sliders. That was the portable thing off to the side. A group of students would stand up there. A queue was called, and some of them would slide things up and some would slide them down, and that's how the light changes were effected. As far as makeup, there were no makeup facilities, but down underneath the stage, there were some storage rooms, and we'd go down there and set up a bunch of mirrors and do our makeup. Costumes would come in on a rolling rack; we'd pick up the costumes we needed and put them on, wear them, and then put them back there.

As for scenery, all the scenery was constructed—I have to back up just a little bit. After the Second World War ended, we had a big influx of students coming onto campus, and there was no housing for them. President Wilkinson went to the military and got some army surplus barracks, a whole row of them, seven of them. They became the Wymount D dorms, and others were just down off the hill. Those dorms, incidentally, are where the Harris Fine Arts Center was put. More dorms were put down off the hill, and that's pretty much where the law building is now; where married housing was. Then there was another large complex of buildings, north of where the Bookstore and the Wilkinson center are now, called the North Building—a bunch of temporary buildings put together in the shape of an E. Then east of that, there was another string of buildings called the Speech Center. The Speech Center housed the classrooms for speech—that is, theatre, public speaking, radio, television, and speech correction. Then further on from that there was a building where the scenery was built, and beyond that there was another building, the Motion Picture Studio. So all of our scenery was built in that temporary building, and then trucked over to the Joseph Smith Building.

The schedule in the Joseph Smith Building was that on Sundays we had church meetings. There were two branches—this was before the stakes and wards—the Campus Branch and the North Campus Branch. Sacrament meetings were held there, and then students went off into the various classrooms for Sunday School classes. So that facility was used all day on Sunday.

At the end of Sunday, everything was cleaned up. If we were going to have a play that week, sometime after midnight—it could have been four o'clock in the morning or even until six o'clock in the morning—the trucks started bringing loads of scenery over, and the students were there setting up the scenery. That night, we had our first rehearsal on the set; of course this is before the Church made Monday night for Family Home Evening. We set up and had the first rehearsal on the set, so we found out what it looked like.

The next night, Tuesday night, we had the lights, so we had the dress rehearsal with costumes, lights, props, and so on. We opened Wednesday night at 8:15 p.m. and played Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and sometimes we had a Saturday matinee. Saturday night after the performance, everything had to come down; everything had to be cleaned up spick and span for church Sunday morning. That was then the arrangement in the Joseph Smith Building.

We were on the quarter system then, and I think there were two shows each quarter, and two in the summer. We also had at least two operas there, and the theatre department built the opera scenery and directed the operas. Then we had additional productions down on Lower Campus still. There was a children's theatre program, and the faculty were also directing plays down there. All of the student productions—student-directed and -acted productions—were held down there as well.

I might mention a little side note on the College Hall. In the early days before this system of scenery, there were two sets of scenery. One set had been built by a professional company that was touring. They came into Provo at the end of their tour, and they didn't want to take their scenery with them. They dumped it—gave it to the school. So that was the professional scenery, and the faculty members used it. It didn't matter whether it was an indoor play or an outdoor play, that

scenery was used. Then there was another set of scenic items that were built by the students, and the students used that scenery.

After Doctor Hansen came, that changed. I don't know what happened to the professional scenery; it was gone by the time I came. Probably all of the audiences had seen it by then, multiple times. So that scenery went away and scenery was built again in the scene shop and trucked down there.

There was also a time when the art classes were all down there in some huge rooms. At one point, the drama department got permission to go into one of those and set up a theatre in the round, and so some arena theatre was done then, and also some reader's theatre at that point.

Doctorate Studies and Becoming Faculty

As I was finishing up my master's degree at BYU, Doctor Hansen told me about an opening at Wayne State University in Detroit, which was developing a new reparatory theatre and they were looking for a lighting person. He was good friends with the chairman at the university, Leonard Leone.

Doctor Hansen said, "You ought to apply for that, because not only could you be on the faculty, but they also have a PhD program, and you could work on that while you're there."

I thought, *Okay. Detroit is a long ways away, and it's a bigger city than Provo, but I'll throw my hat in the ring.* Which I did, and I got a request back: "Let us see some of your material."

I'd never done anything with lighting. Even for my master's project, *The Carousel*, Charles Henson volunteered to do the lighting—because I was under the gun trying to get the scenery done and everything—and I said, "You bet, do it." So he did the lighting for that show.

I had run the dimmers for some other productions, but that was as close as I'd gotten. I remember one time setting up in the Pardoe Theatre. Once the lights were pulled up into position, they were at least thirty feet off the floor; somebody had to get up on an A-frame ladder and set those. It was a ladder that was built like a stepladder, and then there was a part that came up from that. A student got on the ladder, up about thirty feet, adjusting the lights as had been done multiple times before, and while I was in there, a leg of the ladder snapped. The ladder tipped over and the student at the top went clear over and hit the wall, bounced off the wall, and fell down onto the benches below. He broke some teeth out in front, but I don't remember that he broke any bones. So that was a little scary, and I guess I've been a little cautious about getting up on ladders and things since then—I like cherry pickers, but I don't particularly like step ladders.

Anyway, I had not had a whole lot of experience with lighting, but I had my designs. I sent those back to the department, and we exchanged some letters and phone calls and so forth. Finally, one day I got a letter back from the department chair.

He said, "We've decided not to offer that faculty position after all; we're going to just use our man that's here, but we'd like to have you come on as an assistant. We'll give you an assistantship to come and do the lighting for the reparatory theatre that we're building."

It turned out that the theatre had been used by—I want to say the Seventh Day Adventists, but that doesn't sound right. It was built to be used by a church that used theatre as part of their presentation, so they were renovating this over into an open stage theatre.

I went and worked with Gary Whit, who was the lighting designer and a fascinating man. He taught me all kinds of good things about lighting; that's where I got my experience. At the end of that, as I was finishing up my PhD, Doctor Hansen wrote to me and asked if I'd be interested in coming to BYU. Of course I would, and we had some phone calls back and forth, and letters and so on. Finally it turned out that he wasn't able to get all of the ducks in a row fast enough, and I had an interview with another school in Nebraska set up.

Hansen said, "Well, go ahead and do that."

I was offered a position on the spot and given a few days to think about it. I called Doctor Hansen, and said, "This is the situation."

He said he didn't think he was going to get the faculty position, So go ahead and take that this year, and then come to BYU next year."

I said, "Okay," and I went to what was then Kearney State College—it's now the University of Nebraska at Kearney—where I designed four plays, and did the lighting for them. Then I came to BYU in the summer of 1966.

The Harris Fine Arts Center had already been dedicated the year before, and the play that they did to open this building was Barrie Stavis' play *Lamp at Midnight*, the story of Galileo. As a graduate student, I had played Galileo for Gary Stewart, who was directing that play as part of his master's thesis. But I was a little bit late to play Galileo in that production.

Doctor Hansen had hired me to do lighting at BYU, but between the time he hired me and when I got here, Lael Woodbury was appointed to become the department chair. When I met with him he said, "Well, we don't want you to be pigeon-holed; we want you to do everything in theatre here: not just lighting, but design and teaching and acting and the whole bit. So I did.

I wouldn't be able to count up how many faculty members were here when I came, not off the top of my head. Part of it is that at that point, we had public speaking, theatre, radio, television, and speech correction—which the faculty didn't like. They didn't like speech correction, so it became speech re-habitation, and then they didn't like that because you can't be re-habitated if you haven't been able to speak in the first place. So then it became speech habitation—anyway, somewhere along the line, the speech and theatre departments were split, and they went different directions. I think public speaking and speech correction or habitation went over to the college of business; I'm not sure where they wound up. They got their own building across the street, though. There were probably eight or ten faculty, anyway, when I was hired.

Classes and Productions at BYU

As a faculty member I think I have taught everything except playwriting and acting. At one time or another, I've taught design, theatre design, settings and setting designs, lighting design, properties, costumes, all the design aspects. I have also taught play direction, theatre history, makeup—you name it. I have designed setting and lighting for probably about two hundred and twenty or thirty productions.

When I first came on the faculty, we were doing probably about a dozen plays a year on the Pardoe and de Jong stages, and several on the Margetts and Nelke stages. Faculty-directed plays—there would have been at least a dozen—plus three operas, plus various other special things. After a while, we were invited to take plays up to the Promised Valley Playhouse in Salt Lake City. This was an old, legitimate theatre that had been used for a lot of years until movies started coming in; then the emphasis went away from live drama to movies, and it became a movie house. It was a wonderful old theatre with a balcony and everything. As the theatre kept deteriorating, the movies did too, and finally I think they were running X-rated movies there. Somebody found out that it belonged to the LDS Church, and I think the Church may not have known that.

It was brought to their attention, and people said, "Look what you're putting on. This ought to be renovated into a legitimate theatre again, and we ought to be doing good plays here."

Apparently the Brethren thought that was a good idea, and they allocated a bundle of money to redo the front of the house. Nothing was done on the stage, and nothing was done behind the front curtain. It still had the stage, you could go up multiple levels, and there were dressing rooms all the way up for five or six floors, and down underneath were makeup rooms and so on. It was a wonderful old theatre, and we would take one play a semester up there; after it had closed here, we'd gather up the scenery—it had to be designed so it could move—and take it and do a week or two weeks of performances there.

We were doing lots and lots and lots of theatre. Slowly, as some of the old guard started leaving and we got new blood, who weren't quite as interested in spending all their time in the theatre, and the argument was that if we cut back on the number of productions, we could do better theatre. I didn't see that happen, but we've cut back and back and back. In those days, the theatres were filled

to capacity and overflowing—actually we were selling 110%, because there was a certain percentage that wouldn't show. So typically, we had at least 90%, and sometimes more than that, at all of the plays.

At that point, going to the theatre was a night out, a special occasion. Everybody was supposed to dress up, at least in their Sunday best, to come to the theatre. You would not find people putting their feet on the seats of the theatre. You would not find them coming in grubbies and flip-flops and so on. They came dressed up for the theatre. Opening night was an exciting night, and I think everybody was on board for that.

When I came as a student, everybody was expected to dress up every day; not quite in their Sunday best, but the women all wore dresses—that was just a given; and the men all dressed up in classy clothes. The dress was “ivy league” dress. It was polished—I can't remember what the fabric was, but it was a polished look. The men didn't wear ties, but they came dressed very nicely. All the faculty came dressed in suits and ties. We weren't quite to the German thing, like probably it was when Karl G. Maeser was here; nobody stomped their feet when the professor entered, but there was a respect and it was a very friendly school. Everybody said “Hi” as they walked down the sidewalk and met one another. They said “Hi” to the faculty members. It was a closer-knit institution I think.

Interactions with Faculty

The interactions of the faculty and the approach to design were, for the most part, a very collaborative effort. We would sit down and banter ideas back and forth. I remember designing for Charles Metten one time, who was doing *The Wild Duck*. The production was going to be later on in the school year, but we had gone to—I think it was Harold Oaks' place, I think Harold was the department chair at that point. We had gone to his place and were having an opening faculty social, and Chuck Hansen and I were sitting down across from each other at a long table covered with butcher paper, as I recall. We started talking about *The Wild Duck*, and we started getting some ideas, so I pulled out a pen and started making some sketches on the tablecloth.

He would say, “Well, yes and we could do this,” and I would make notes.

At the end of the party, I went over and ripped out a piece of the tablecloth and took it home, and that became the basis for the set. It was a very collaborative effort.

Another time comes to mind that was not as happy. It was with a faculty member who came later on, and left a little bit earlier. Generally, it was more of a collaborative effort with him too, but on this particular occasion, I was slow getting a copy of the script. As soon as I got it, I sketched out some ideas and the floor plan and ran up to him to show it to him.

I said, “How about something like this?”

He replied, “Well, no, it ought to be like this and this and this,” and he described it.

I said, “That's the same floor plan that's in the book.”

He said, “Yeah, but it's good.”

I said, “It's a bad floor plan. If a student had come to me with that floor plan, I wouldn't have given him more than a C on it.”

“Well, yes.”

“You've already started blocking, haven't you?” I asked.

“Well, yeah, so we need to use this floor plan.”

I said, “Okay. I will put this floor plan on the stage. You won't like it and you will be sorry, but I will put it there.” (I did, and he was sorry.)

He said, “We need to fly this in.”

I said, “I'm sorry, you're out on the apron. There is no fly room over the apron, there's no place it can go. The only place we can fly is upstage of the curtain.”

“Well, what are we going to do?”

We tried to come up with some ideas, and he told me later, “Yes, I'm sorry. I should have listened.” But there have been some fun set designs.

Favorite Set Designs

If you were to ask what is my favorite set design, I would say, “My favorite set design is the one I’m working on right now.” However, there have been a number of set designs that I’ve had a lot of fun with. One that comes to mind was an adaptation of a book: *Papa Married a Mormon*. Chuck Whitman did the adaptation, and Chuck Metten directed the play. As I read the script, it seemed to me that we had a whole bunch of disjointed vignettes.

I went to the director and said, “We need more cohesiveness here: it might be like the stage manager from *Our Town*, or might be the ‘everybody’ in *A Man for all Seasons*. The guy that’s an everyman type character that ties it all together—somebody that’s sort of a narrator who ties these vignettes together somehow.”

He bought the idea and went back to the playwright. They came up with the idea of having one of the kids in the play come back as an adult and remember some things. Then the set was a skeletal set of the era when the play took place. The man who’s grown up now came in and started remembering things, and it came to life; the lights came up and he pulled cloth off from the furniture and it went forward. It was a very rewarding experience.

Another one that comes to mind was one that Harold Hansen directed: *A Man for All Seasons*. Knowing that he likes all kinds of platforms and steps and levels and so forth, after I got a copy of the script, I said, “Well, I guess you want your typical platforms and steps and so forth.”

He looked right back at me and he said, “No, I don’t want your typical steps and platforms and so forth.”

I said, “Okay.” I was ready to be taught.

He said, “How about stainless steel? It needs to have stainless steel.” He left it there.

I went back to my office, which was just next door to his, and stewed about that for a couple of days.

When I came back, I said, “You know, stainless steel is awfully expensive and takes special welding skills. It’s very heavy, and I’m not sure that this is going to work.

He said, “No, I don’t want stainless steel, but I want that feeling.”

I thought, *Okay, what’s that feeling?*

I went back to my office and again designed a skeletal set. It had huge gothic arches made out of tubular steel that reflected the light and tubular steel that held up the platforms and so on. I brought that into him, and he was very happy with that one as a “for instance.”

Memories of the University

My favorite teaching moments are “ah ha” moments. Not a specific one, but just when somebody catches the picture. That may be in trying to design a set and realizing that if we begin with a house that has four walls, for instance, and then open up that house so that it can communicate to the audience; they understand that it’s not just frames—wooden frames with canvas on that are put in different shapes—but it represents something; it suggests something that we might see somewhere in the community, or in the country. Or when they grasp the notion of how we mix colors together in lighting to create what we’re trying to achieve on the stage or something like that. It’s that “ah ha” moment when they finally get it all together.

In the first play I was in, Ivan Crosland, who became a faculty member here, was a Genie. There was supposed to be a flash, and suddenly he’d appear. Everything went well, except the flash didn’t happen when it was supposed to; he stepped across the flash with flowing robes when the flash went off. Fortunately, it didn’t catch his costume on fire, but as he stepped across into view and the lights came up, smoke was coming out of him—out of his sleeves and out of various parts of his garments—and it created kind of an interesting situation.

There was another situation where an actor was trying to make a quick exit, but didn’t make it; he slipped and fell, and when the curtain opened, there he was hanging upside down with his leg caught, trying to figure out how to get back up there.

Another: I was in a play called *Time Remembered*, an ennui play directed by Preston Gledhill on the old Joseph Smith Stage. We had been rehearsing, rehearsing, but come the first night, Monday night, the scenery wasn't ready. Come Tuesday night, dress rehearsal, and the second act scenery wasn't ready. Come opening night, we had the scenery for the first act; it was a two-act play, and the rest of the scenery wasn't ready yet. When the curtain closed at the end of the first act, everybody scrambled to try and get all the scenery off the stage, and the guys from the shop, who were in grubby clothes, were bringing the new scenery on. It still had wet paint. They set it up, and we were supposed to stay back away from it.

"Don't get near this with your costumes; we don't want any paint on the costumes."

We started the second act, and none of us knew what was behind us; we didn't know what the scenery looked like. From time to time, we did the bad thing of glancing over our shoulder to see what we were playing against.

One other: It's on me. I played Tony, the male romantic lead in the play *You Can't Take It With You*. There was a place where the two, Tony and Alice, were supposed to kiss, and I was essentially engaged at that point and was not interested in doing a real kiss.

I said, "We'll do a stage kiss; we'll do a fake kiss, a movie kiss."

Albert Mitchell was the director, and I kept putting him off and putting him off and putting him off. Finally it came to the dress rehearsal, and he said, "We've got to have a kiss."

I said to the girl playing Alice, "We'll just do a stage kiss." She had no idea what that was and we bubbled around.

Dr. Mitchell said, "That won't do, you've got to kiss her."

So I said, "Okay," and I did.

Then the next night before we started the play, when he had the cast together, he said, "Karl, you're too stiff. You've got to loosen up and play that love scene better."

I loosened up and I played that scene better. He came back stage at the end of the play and said, "That's too much. You've got to pull it back."

The next couple of nights, we pulled it back, and he was happy.

Changes in the Department

I am amazed at how much media the Theatre and Media Department, or whatever it happens to be called, has now that we didn't have. For instance, about the middle of the time that I was here, the typical drama set probably cost somewhere around fifteen hundred dollars; if we could pull it in for around a thousand, that was better. For a musical, we might bump it up to eighteen hundred or even two thousand dollars. But that was it. As far as having a lot of extra money to buy lighting equipment, sound equipment—well, we didn't have sound equipment; sound equipment was brought over by the audiovisual people. But dimming equipment, we just couldn't afford. We had a budget, and we stayed within that budget. So, as I say, I am interested in and amazed at the things I now see here.

On the Joseph Smith stage, as I mentioned earlier, we were using auto transformer dimmers. That was state of the art. Those were Ariel Davis dimmers. In fact, Ariel Davis is a product of BYU. He (Ariel Davis) put Davis dimmers down on the Lower Campus stage for the College Hall stage. He was very involved with things happening here. When I came here as faculty to this building, we had Ariel Davis Five Scene Preset SCR dimmers, and that was great.

At Wayne state, we had a Ten Preset Eisenhower Board, that's a thyatron dimmer. All of those dimmers, a hundred of them, were in a separate room with air conditioning going all the time to cool the dimmers. So it was hard to come to BYU and have a Five Scene Preset Board—we were able to fade back and forth between this one and this one and this one, these different scenes, and by the time we got down to five, some student—or students, sometimes it took two of them—had to be resetting number one, number two, and so forth before we got there, so that we were able to go in those again. We got into several different boards over the years, and finally got to the point where we were computerized, which was wonderful.

We could go through and set up all of the lighting cues and hit the button and say, “Remember this. Remember how long it’s going to take, and what’s going to happen up and down and everything else.”

Again, the strides that have been made with computerized dimmers are almost overwhelming. It’s almost like leaving the covered wagon and getting on a jet. It’s been quite fascinating for me to see the change in technology. This didn’t change my design as far as the set, but it did as far as the lighting.

Again, I should throw in a little more history. When I came here, the Pardoe stage had one beam where the so-called third beam is now.

I said, “That doesn’t work, it’s too low. We need to come up here and cut in a new one.”

We talked to the physical plant, who said, “Oh no, that can’t be done.” They would have to pour a concrete floor in there and it would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and couldn’t be done.

I said, “Okay, just cut some holes and hang a pipe in there that I can hang some spotlights on. We’ll get up from below and adjust those and so forth.”

So they did, and we did. Then we, some of the lighting people, started pulling out some of the sheet rock and getting rid of it. Eventually, we were able to put some two-bys up there so we could lie down and adjust those lights, and eventually the physical plant decided that they could do something about it, so we finally got a catwalk up there.

Then I said, “We need some lights closer,” and we got the first beam. Then the cold lights were all open, just there on ladders, and I said, “This is not good; I want some doors on it,” so they put the door on for me.

There have been a number of changes; a part of the problem was that the architects knew we needed a beam position, so they put one in, but they had no idea about angles or stage lighting, so there was no preparation, no planning, as far as theatre lighting.

Chuck Hansen, who was doing the lighting, freely admitted that he wasn’t into lighting, and that’s one of the reasons I was hired to do the lighting.

We used to have a patch board over in the Joseph Smith Building. It was a “put in a cord here and plug it in there” kind of patch board. On these stages, we had Ariel Davis so-called “quick connects,” where you would do a slider up and snap it in so that you would be able to go from one dimmer to a circuit kind of thing. Then as we got more and more dimmers, and more and more circuits, there were a lot more possibilities as far as angles. Instead of just doing a couple lights from the front, we could do three lights per area in front and two lights on the side and a couple of lights from behind. The lighting design made all kinds of steps forward, I would say, because of that.

The Theatre Department

Early on, the department was defined as family. Everybody was in it together. Everybody was pulling for one another. Everybody went to see everybody’s shows—not just patting each other on the back, but it was family. People would help each other out in a bind.

I remember I did a play down on the concert hall stage, and it had three full sets. I had marble columns, and we were painting them with black and then coming over it with a feather. Chuck Hansen came in and helped paint, just because he wanted to be helpful.

I would say it was family. It was theatre like this. Later on it started becoming compartmentalized—“This is mine, stay away; this is mine, don’t touch it.” I didn’t feel the camaraderie.

Preston Gledhill, who graduated from school in Paris, used to throw French terms at us all the time, and he used the French phrase *esprit de corps*—there was an *esprit de corps* at the beginning. Later on, I didn’t see that so much.

I have to say this too: early on, people would say, “Oh, you’re at BYU; you can’t do what you want to do; you are censored all the time.”

I said, “No, we’re not censored. We can do any play at BYU we want to do.” That was a true statement. But nobody wanted to do anything that was “pushing the envelope,” as we might say. We were doing productions that could be done in the Joseph Smith Auditorium, or on the Church stage. I don’t see that so much anymore, unfortunately.

You may say, “Well, it ain’t life.” Well, there are a lot of things that are life that I don’t think need to be blown up on the silver screen, or need to be put on the stage.

I’d also like to say that I think the faculty was very conservative when I started, and less so now. Whether that’s good or bad, I guess we’ll just have to let that one rest.

I know that I’ve been heavily influenced—well, you can already see—by Dr. Harold I. Hansen and his philosophy. He didn’t start the Hill Cumorah pageant, but he was the one that was really pretty much the father of it for forty years. I worked with him back there as a technical director for a number of years. It was a little different experience then than we have today, I think.